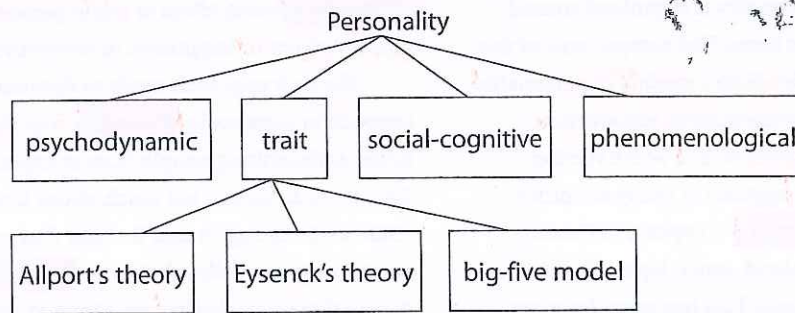


- C. Now read the passage to see if your prediction is correct. Try to read as quickly as you can. Do not stop to look up words in your dictionary.

Reading 2



Approaches to Personality

The Trait Approach to Personality

A researcher can choose from among many methods to investigate personality. The method that is used depends on which approach to personality the researcher takes. There are four main approaches: psychodynamic, trait, social-cognitive, and phenomenological. The trait approach views personality as the combination of stable internal characteristics. People display these characteristics consistently over time and across situations. In other words, these characteristics do not usually change.

Allport's Trait Theory

Gordon Allport was a trait theorist. He spent 30 years searching for the traits that combine to form normal personality. He believed that the set of labels used to describe a specific person reflects a person's central traits. Central traits organize and control behavior in many different situations. They tell what can be expected from a person most of the time. They are also usually apparent to others. Central traits are similar to the descriptive terms used in letters of recommendation. *Reliable* is an example of a central trait.

Allport also believed that people have secondary traits. Secondary traits are more specific

to certain situations. They control behavior less than central traits do. *Dislikes crowds* is an example of a secondary trait. In his research, Allport focused on the uniqueness of each individual personality. This focus, however, makes it difficult to draw general conclusions about the structure of human personality.

Eysenck's Biological Trait Theory

Another trait theorist was Hans Eysenck, a British psychologist. He used a technique called factor analysis to study the structure of both normal and disordered personalities. Factor analysis can reveal, for example, if anxious people are also moody. It can reveal if optimistic people are usually also friendly. Eysenck concluded that personality can be described in terms of three main factors or dimensions. Those factors are introversion-extraversion, emotionality-stability, and psychoticism.

According to Eysenck, personality can be described in terms of where a person falls along these three dimensions. He believed that differences in personality characteristics can be traced to inherited differences in the brain. He also believed that these biological differences explain why some people are more physiologically aroused or excitable than others. For example, he believed that people who have a low

arousal level will be **extraverted**. He believed that those with more sensitive nervous systems are likely to be **introverted**.

Big-Five Model of Personality

Other research has led many **trait theorists** today to conclude that personality is organized around five basic factors, not three. The components of this **big-five model**, or **five-factor model**, of personality are **openness**, **conscientiousness**, **extraversion**, **agreeableness**, and **neuroticism**. Some version of the **big-five model** appears in many countries and cultures. **For example**, it appears in Canada, China, Germany, Finland, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Poland. This fact provides more evidence that these factors **may represent basic components of human personality**.

The emergence of the **big-five model** is considered **a major breakthrough in personality**

research. Identification of the big-five traits provides a standard way to **study the personalities of all people**. **It no longer matters** where people live or what their economic, social, and cultural backgrounds are. The model allows researchers to precisely describe the **similarities and differences in people's personalities**. **It also allows** researchers to **relate personality characteristics to happiness**, or subjective well-being.

The trait approach tends to dominate **current research in personality**. **However**, **trait theories** are better at describing people than at explaining them. **Trait theories** do not tell much about how traits relate to the thoughts and feelings that precede, accompany, and follow behavior. **As a result**, some **personality psychologists** are trying to link their research with that of **cognitive psychologists**. **They hope it will help them to understand better** how thoughts and emotions influence, and are influenced by, **personality traits**.

Key Concept Words

big-five model – (n.) an approach to personality organized around five basic factors; see *five-factor model*

central traits – (n.) features of a person's character which organize and control the person's behavior and which are apparent to others

emotionality-stability – (n.) personality factor with ranges from moody and anxious to calm and relaxed

factor analysis – (n.) a technique used to study personality traits

five-factor model – (n.) an approach to personality organized around five basic factors: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; see *big-five model*

introversion-extraversion – (n.) personality factor with ranges from quiet and thoughtful to sociable and outgoing

psychoticism – (n.) personality factor with ranges from cruel and hostile to warm and accepting

secondary traits – (n.) features of a person's character which are specific to certain situations and which control only some aspects of the person's behavior

trait approach – (n.) a view of personality as a combination of traits or characteristics that people exhibit and which do not change over time